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A Uniquely Human Magic

 OC

Suggested reading music

A branch swiped across Erick's face as he made his way clumsily through the moonlit forest. The small cut it left would normally be a cause for him to stop and check it, but tonight he didn't care. His hand instinctively went to the pistol in his pocket to just make sure it was still there. All of it, the pain, the embarrassment, the depression, would all be over soon.

His mind and body pushed on to dark places as he took step after step into the old growth forest. He hated this place. His parents had come here to try and get away from all the troubles he was having socially with school and his friends. As far as he was concerned all it did was isolate him in a small house in the middle of nowhere with no company other than them.

Up ahead and to the left, he saw a break in the trees. He glimpsed through the undergrowth that it opened up into a meadow. That seemed as good a place as any, he thought, and moved toward it.

When he reached the edge of the clearing, he saw the moon overhead bathing the area in soft pale light. It would have been a perfect place to do it, if not for what he saw in the middle of the open space.

Though it was hard to tell for sure, it looked like a young woman standing surrounded by a pack of large black dogs. Blinking to try and force his eyes to focus through the dark, he strained to get a better look. The dogs, if you could call them that, paced in a circle around the woman. Their fur was dark black, and he couldn't make out any details of their bodies. They seemed almost more like void spaces than living beings.

The woman was down on her knees facing away from him. From the way she winced at the movements of the prowling dogs it was clear to him she was in danger.

Taking the pistol out of his pocket, he raised it above his head and shouted, "Hey! Get away from her right now!"

He felt stupid as soon as he shouted at them. He knew words were going to be less important than the emotion in your voice, but it was all he could think to say. Even the best trained dogs could only vaguely understand complex human commands from a stranger. It's not like wild dogs or wolves could understand human language and obey.

But then, they all stopped pacing around the woman and started to walk away from her.

As they did so, the black forms of the dogs took on a new disturbing dynamic as one by one they turned glowing red eyes toward him. Some glanced at the woman and then returned their gaze to this new intruder. A low growl escaped from the throats of at least half of them, and Erick was beginning to think he had made a huge mistake. Looking now, he saw that there were thirteen of them. He wasn't even sure the gun had that many bullets in it.

The woman slowly turned as she rose from the ground to look at him. Her clothing consisted of a long flowing dress that seemed almost radiant in the moonlight. Her wide eyes fixed on him and her mouth was slightly agape.

The thought of this being a mistake were obsolete now. He had to try and save her from these things.

"Go on! Get away from her. Leave!"

They took a handful of steps back and paused again.

"Keep going! I don't want to see you, got it? Get out of here!" he commanded a third time.

At this, a low rumble of growls bubbled out of them, and one by one, they dissolved into a black mist that clung to the ground in small pools of darkness. As he watched, they began to stream away in whatever direction was closest to the edge of the meadow. As they went, they never took their glowing eyes off of him.

He began moving toward the woman and as he got close, he saw a faint shimmer and scarcest breath of a glow in the air around her. It drew his eyes down to see she was standing in a circle of mushrooms.

As he approached, she raised a hand to shield her face from him and squinted, "Please," she said with an exotic accent, "Please don't come closer."

"Why not?" he asked.

She backed to the edge of the circle away from him, glanced around as if considering her options.

"I am..." She replied.

He waited for a moment then said, "Yes?"

Her shoulders slumped somewhat and she turned her face away from him, "I am afraid."

"Of what? Those dog things seem to have gone now."

She lowered her hand and squinted as she turned her face toward him again, "I am not afraid of those hunters. They cannot harm me here."

"Oh," Erick said, "Of course."

He looked around to make sure the dogs had gone and then put the gun down on the ground in the tall grass.

"There, feel a little better now?"

She looked at the patch of grass where he had put the gun then back to him, "No."

"Okay," he began, "What if I step over here away from that?"

She watched as he slowly and carefully got some distance between himself and the firearm, then repeated, "No."

"You're kidding, right? What else is there to be afraid of?" he asked spreading his arms.

"Do you really believe one of my kind would be so foolish as to jest with a being such as yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

She reached out a finger hesitantly and pointed it at him, "You. I am afraid of you."

He was taken aback by that.

"What? Why would you be afraid of me?"

"Do not mock me," she said, "I am trapped. If I leave the circle, the hounds will have me. If I stay, I am at your mercy. At least with you there is some chance I may yet live. You know this, allow me some dignity."

He saw a single tear roll down her cheek. Now he knew that even though she was putting a strong face on it, she was terrified.

Feeling the tear, she turned her head away to hide her face from him again. When she did so, one of her ears escaped her hair. It had an elegant shape that ended in a noticeably pointed tip.

Erick had heard from the local grocery store owner, an older woman with frizzy graying hair, a kind smile, and a mischievous twinkle in her eye, that the woods out here had Fair Folk in them. He had just figured she was being friendly and was a few sandwiches short of a picnic. He was having second thoughts about that now.

"You, are you a," He paused trying to think of the best word to use, "Fey?"

She furrowed her brows and asked, "You mean, you really don't know?"

"No, I haven't ever met one that I know of before."

"But you have the sight. How could I be the first you have ever seen?"

Erick shrugged, "Well, I lived in the city my whole life. This is my first time living out in the woods. Wait, you aren't going to cast some sort of spell on me or something are you?"

Her shock was clear, and she whispered, "Oh no, I would not dare such a thing."

Erick didn't quite know what to make of that, and asked, "So you do have magical powers then?"

"Of a sort, yes. All my kind do. It is nothing compared to that of one of the Creator's Children, however."

"Who are they?" Erick asked.

She gave him a skeptical look, but that soon melted into surprise, "Truly?"

"I don't know. Please tell me," he responded.

"You are. You are one of the Creator's Children," she said.

"What's so special about me?" he asked.

"You are a human."

"So all humans are Creator's Children?"

"Yes."

"And all humans are magical?"

She nodded and replied, "Yes."

He couldn't quite wrap his head around that, "But there are stories of the Fey using magic in almost all the stories we have of you. How can you say we have magic when we can't do any of the things in the stories?"

She tilted her head to one side, then corrected it before responding, "They are not the same kind of magic. Yours is the primal power of creation itself. It is the ability to make the world into what you wish it to be. This is far beyond the magics of my kind."

"But, that doesn't make sense. Wouldn't we know if we were magical? I mean, I can't fly or swim the oceans."

"Can you not? I have in my gifts of seeing beheld many of your kind fly and swim the oceans."

"No, we use airplanes and ships for that."

She turned her face toward him again and raised a hand to shield her eyes, "It is so commonplace to you that you no longer see it for the miracle of creation that it is. There is more magic in the world now than there has ever been if you know where to look for it."

Erick scratched his chin and said, "That's just technology. There's nothing magical about that. I can't accept that. Humans aren't magical."

"Believe me, or do not. These are only the magics I thought would be obvious to you, however. There are others far more powerful and ancient. A few, even, trace back to the origins of the creation itself."

"Why don't we see those then?"

"You do not see because you do not know where to look."

"Where should I look then?"

She took a step toward him and raised a hand, "My gifts are of sight, and with them, I can help others see. I will help your eyes open to what lies behind the veil of the mundane."

She spoke in a tongue somehow familiar to him, but he was sure he had never heard it before. It sounded like something very old from the Middle East somewhere.

When she was done, the darkness of the night lifted and the entire meadow shone as bright as if it were in the midday sun. In front of him, she was shining brilliantly, yet it didn't hurt his eyes. Light spilled over the grasses and trees with all the colors of the rainbow, rippling like it was being reflected off of gentle waters.

"Wow," he breathed, "You are glowing. It's beautiful."

She took her hand away from her face and squinted up at his face, "It is not my light you see, Child of the Creator. It is yours."

He looked down at his hands. Ribbons of light and energy flowed around and through his body. Two dominated among the others. One a stream of smooth golden light with sparkles, and the other a fierce red band that danced little streams of electricity off of his skin. The golden and red colors of these bands predominated, though all colors were represented.

"This...is my magic?" he asked.

"No," she responded, "That is the magic of others. Your kind of magic manifests on the recipient."

"So people have been using their magic on me?"

"Some of these were woven over you while you were still in your mother's womb. Many of them have marked you and grown with you. They have guided you and created you into what you are today."

"Who? What have they been doing to me?"

She stepped toward him and reached out a hand, gently dipping a finger in one of the streams of energy, "This golden one here is from your mother. It has nurtured and healed you. It has comforted and consoled you. This is a power common to mothers, but hers is especially strong upon you."

"What's this red one?" he asked holding his hand closer to his face to look at it more carefully, "It seems to wrap around me all over."

"That red one is from your father." She said, reaching out to touch it.

One of the crimson bolts jumped out at her with a snap of electricity and she pulled her hand quickly back.

"It is very protective of you," she said with a smile, "Not all are so fortunate."

"I don't understand. How did they do this? How does this magic work?"

She shrugged, "My kind are a part of the creation, and cannot fathom this wonder. You weave this magic into the world, and the rest of creation watches, and longs for what might have been. That, and what is promised again."

Erick looked down into her squinting eyes and asked, "What is it you long for?"

She strained through tears as she whispered, "For you to return to whence you fell, and become what you were made and empowered to be."

"And you know what that is?"

"Yes," she breathed, "All of my kind was there, in the beginning before the rebellion. We saw the world as it was meant to be. We saw, and seeing we now struggle to hope for its return. Creation is broken. It has caused pain and suffering, war and hatred, pestilence and famine.

She turned and looked longingly out toward the forest, "Those of my kind that lose hope turn into things like those hounds you saw before. They lose themselves to hatred of the Children, and despair for themselves."

Erick smiled faintly, "But not you?"

She returned it, "No, not yet, and I hope not ever. I trust in the Creator and hope to one day see the restoration of all things, and what new may yet come to pass."

"You really think we can be that again?"

"The Creator made it possible. I have faith."

Erick turned and took a few paces before facing her again, "I need to understand more about this magic if I am going to use it. What else do you see in all this stuff that surrounds me?"

"I see this one is for your learning," she said, pointing to a thin but vibrant green band reaching into his mind and heart.

"That one is for strength and quickness of mind. Those four here are to encourage and guide you to prosperity. This one is a piece that was woven for the prosperity of a group of which you are a part."

As she pointed out and identified what she could out of the innumerable magics woven over and through him, he began to understand the nature of the magic humans wielded. It was so simple, and something he had taken for granted his entire life.

"You can stop," he said, "I understand now."

She rubbed her eyes and closed them to rest them from the strain of looking at him.

"What do you understand?"

"Each one of these streams in the weave is from a different person. Each one is someone that has invested in me over my life. My parents nurturing and protecting me, my soccer coach to strengthen me and make me a smart player, my teachers who have invested to teach me about the world. Friends, family, even leaders and groups have played a part in all this. I understand what human magic is now, and why we so easily take it for granted. We live in it every day, so it becomes background noise to us. It's funny, it was there all along."

"What was?" she asked opening her eyes.

"Love in its many forms. Concern, compassion, kindness, charity, all these things are facets of Love."

"I do not understand," she said.

"I think I know why," he responded, "Since you are a part of nature, I understand why you don't comprehend us. We are in so many ways outside the red and tooth and claw that is the natural world. If what you say is true, we were created to be something different. We are able to influence and change the system from the outside."

He squared his stance to face her fully and said, "Do you know why I came out here tonight?"

"No."

"I was going to kill myself. I didn't think anyone cared about me or loved me. I thought I was alone. You opened my eyes to see that wasn't true."

She bowed her head and looked down to the ground at their feet, "It would be a tragedy to creation itself if one of the Children were lost in such a way. The smallest strand of magic in your weave is more powerful than anything the greatest of our courts could dare attempt. It would be an immeasurable loss."

"I think I see that now. Thank you."

With those words, he stepped into the circle and wrapped his arms around her. She stiffened at the embrace at first, but then relaxed and soaked it in. When he began to pull away, she grabbed him and returned the hug.

"I have not felt the touch of another for a thousand years, please, just a little longer."

"What? Why?"

"That is how long I have been trapped here by the thirteen."

She was small, and delicate, and colder than Erick thought she would be to the touch. When she was done, she released him and they pulled away from one another.

"I forgot how wonderful it was to be held by a friend. Thank you. I hope it will not be another thousand years before I feel that again."

"You can leave the circle."

"No, I cannot. To leave is to abandon the only defense I have against those that seek my life."

"Who are they?" he asked.

"The Creator made us fourteen siblings, seven male and seven female. They are my family."

She lowered her head and her voice quieted to a breathy whisper, "One by one I watched over the millennia as they fell to despair. I alone of them remain and hold on to hope. Now, the rage they have for the Children has spilled over on to me. Since they have been unable to turn me, they now seek my life."

Erick reached out a hand and gently put a finger under her chin. He lifted her face until she was looking directly into his eyes.

"I don't think they can harm you anymore."

He turned to look at her arm and nodded at it. She looked. A strand of pale blue energy began weaving itself around and through her body. It sparked from time to time with magical essence.

"You...you have protected me," she sputtered, "I am free?"

"Yes, you are. Never lose hope."

She bowed and then stepped out of the circle for the first time since before the Crusades.

As soon as she did, a low growl rumbled out from the forest, and thirteen sets of glowing red eyes fixed on them from the shadows.

She stopped walking and said quietly, "They have been waiting for me to leave the circle for ten centuries. I don't know if they will be able to resist attacking."

"What happens if they do?" Erick asked.

"The protections you placed on me will destroy them utterly," she said, a small tear rolling down her cheek, "even after all they have done, I do not wish them to die."

Erick looked out into the forest at those creatures and said, "I had lost hope when I came on this meadow. Is there anything that can be done for them?"

She looked up at him with sad eyes, "Nothing I know can reverse the transformation."

It was only then he noticed she was no longer squinting.

“Do your eyes not hurt to look at me anymore?”

Her eyes widened, and she exclaimed, “No, they don’t. What happened?”

He smiled at her and said, “It must be magic.”

Before they reached the woods, the wolves all charged out of the forest toward them. Far from alarm, the both of them simply watched the black creatures approach.

Erick looked at his companion and saw her face contorted with sorrow and pity. He knew he had to try something.

He stepped forward and stretched out a hand toward them and said, “I’m sorry.”

Streams of magic wrapped around each of them and picked them up off of the ground.

“I’m sorry we haven’t been doing our job. I’m sorry we have brought so much pain and suffering into the world. I’m sorry, above all else, that we have given you reason to lose hope. Please, give us another chance to earn your trust. As parts of creation, I understand now how important you are, and I will care for you. Please, walk away from your despair and take your place in this world.”

One by one, they stopped struggling against the magic that bound them. When the last had stopped, the blackness seemed to almost congeal and drip off of them. When it was done, what was left were six women and seven men of the Fey standing before the two of them.

Tears were streaming around Erick’s companions face as she said, “My brothers and sisters, how long I wept for your loss. Now, a day I never dared dream of has come and I shed tears of joy for we are reunited once more.”

They came together and joined hands and greeted one another. They turned to face Erick and each of the former wolves now had tiaras of golden magical energy encircling their heads like crowns.

One of the men stepped forward and said, “Thank you, Child of the Creator. You have saved us from despair, and we will forever be grateful. May we never again taste of despair and fear.”

With that, they all walked into the forest, and a mist rose to greet them. Before she left, his new Fey friend turned and smiled warmly at him. She bowed to him and stepped back into the swirling vapors and disappeared.

When the fog dissipated, they were gone. All Erick could do was stand there dumbfounded for a time. eventually, he noticed the light he was radiating was dimming. Her enchantment allowing him to see magic was beginning to wear off. Taking advantage of what light was left, he ran to retrieve his father's pistol, and made his way back home. Aided by the glow, it was much faster to get home than it had been on the way out.

When he rounded a bend in the driveway and came within sight of the house, he saw his mom waiting by a window. She yelled something into the house behind her and soon burst out the front door running toward him. He walked toward her, and she nearly knocked him over with a hug when she reached him.

"Oh, Erick, I was so worried! You went out, and then your father couldn't find the pistol he uses to stay safe on walks and we thought...well, we thought you might have done something."

He hugged her back, and in the fading enchantment saw the myriad layers of magics she had accumulated over her lifetime. He wondered which one was his, and decided to make it stronger every chance he got.

Over his mom's shoulder, he saw his dad come out of the door. He was an overweight man, and he lumbered in a sort of half walk half jog down the driveway toward them.

His arms were soon added to the embrace, and he said, "You had me, us, worried son. I couldn't find my pistol and with all the things you have been going through lately I thought you may have done something."

"I was in a dark place, but I came through it."

Without letting go, his dad asked, "You sure you are through it?"

"Yeah, Dad. I'm sure."

His mom asked him, "What got you past it?"

With his head bowed and smashed into his parent's shoulders, he said, "I realized how much you guys and others love me, and it helped me understand what I wasn't seeing."

"What helped you see that?" his mother asked.

"It was something I found in the woods."

His father straightened up a little and looking at him asked, "What did you find out there?"

He smiled and said, "Perspective."

They stood there holding one another for some time, and eventually his father said, "Okay, let's get inside out of the night. It's dark out here."

As the three of them walked back to the house, Erick stole a look behind him. He saw, in a moonbeam filtering through the trees, the mysterious Fey standing there in the driveway with a smile on her face.

For the rest of his long life, in times of triumph or turmoil, Erick never forgot that night in the woods and the woman who opened his eyes to a uniquely human magic.